



# US Nuclear Weapons Rebuild and the New Nuclear Arms Race

## Background

- The United States developed its nuclear arsenal during the Cold War arms race, and continues to maintain it today, based on a **theory of deterrence**: that the threat of using nuclear weapons, and the resulting destruction and loss of life, will prevent an aggressor from initiating an attack using their own weapons.
- In 1970, the United States joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and general global disarmament. The treaty has since been joined by 190 countries, and was renewed indefinitely in 1992.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2009, former President Obama made a statement declaring that the United States would “seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”<sup>2</sup> The Obama administration also conceded that the United States could maintain US Security with far fewer nuclear warheads.<sup>3</sup>
- Since then, the New START Treaty, signed by Russia and the United States in 2010, has paved the way for nuclear weapons modernization and a new arms race.
- While the New START Treaty outlines a goal of reducing the total number of nuclear weapons, it also allows for “modernization” of the current stockpile.<sup>4</sup> The current budget requests would allow the US to maintain the nuclear arsenal at essentially the same size as 2010 New START levels.<sup>3</sup>

## The Cost

- The administration’s commitment to maintaining the nuclear weapons arsenal is reflected in the fact that the Department of Defense and Department of Energy requested a combined \$23 billion for nuclear weapons spending in 2016.<sup>3</sup>
- The projected spending on nuclear weapons modernization and maintenance over the next ten years comes to \$400 billion. Over the next 30 years, the US nuclear weapons modernization program is estimated to cost over \$1 trillion.<sup>3</sup>
- There has been significant concern over where funding for modernization on this scale would come from, and it is likely that these plans would siphon funds from the conventional military budget.<sup>5,6</sup>



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# What will the money be spent on?



- The current nuclear program would allocate money to both modernize or upgrade existing weapons and delivery systems, as well as completely replacing current systems with new ones. The effort would include spending on<sup>3</sup>:
  - A new fleet of 12 ballistic missile submarines to replace retiring submarines, 7 of which are based in Bangor, WA. Each submarine will hold 20 missiles, which each carry up to 8 warheads.
  - Replacing Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles with new missiles and supporting infrastructure.
  - A new strategic bomber fleet and continuing modification of current bombers, including the purchase of 80-100 new bombers to replace older models.
  - Developing a new fleet of long range standoff missiles (LRSOs) to replace air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). This would entail the purchase of 1,000 new missiles, roughly doubling the size of the existing ALCM fleet.
- These programs have differing lifespans, but the overall scheme would extend our nuclear weapons program into the 2080s.<sup>3</sup>

Martin Fleck, Security Programs Director at PSR, summarizes our stance on modernization: “We cannot afford the modernization plan, as it does nothing to enhance our security. The most dangerous aspect of the trillion-dollar plan is that it encourages other nuclear weapons states to upgrade their own arsenals, and encourages non-nuclear weapons states to acquire them. Our current program obstructs progress toward true disarmament at a time when the US should be supporting global efforts to prohibit nuclear weapons, for the same reasons chemical and biological weapons have already been prohibited.”

## References

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